1:Barnes E-5 (1946-1949) 1954 FR5 Ngoni FR5
Mpezeni

as diagnostic of the presence of the kind of segmentary society in which we are interested. All the societies included by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard in their stateless category, i.e. Logoli, Tallensi and Nuer, have continually segmenting political systems. Of the societies with government, the Zulu were like the Ngoni in being a State and yet having a political system which was continually segmenting. Both of these states were organized by a segmentary system even at the highest level, so that it does not seem necessary to follow Fortes in restricting segmentary systems to only the subdivisions of states. In Shaka's time various changes came about in Zululand, such as the concentration of the army in a central area, which lessened the importance of the segmentary organization. But in the eighteenth century large-scale relations between and within the Ngoni chiefdoms were governed by the agnatic segmentary organization, that is, by the division of the people into clans, sub-clans, and lineages and by the continual transfer of allegiance by lineage segments from one chief to another. Even during the period of the Zulu empire, the continual segmentation of the constituent tribes was important in maintaining the power of the central government over them.[2]

If one of the main characteristics of the well-known African lineage systems, both in stateless societies like the Nuer, Tallensi, Logoli and Gusii, and in primitive states like the Zulu, is their political function, we may well inquire if these systems are not also one type in a more general category of political systems. Although lineage relations are essentially distinct from kinship relations, a lineage system defines political relations in the idiom of kinship. Thus in agnatic systems, the relationship between territorial groups may be expressed in terms of the relationships between founding ancestors who were brothers or fathers and sons. We have seen how among the Ngoni the relationship between captor and captive, between lord and dependant, and hence the relationship between the segments they founded, was expressed in agnatic terms. The relationship between husband and wife, lord and lady, was employed to define the relationship between the political groups they led, and in this respect the Ngoni system may be seen as taking one stage further the process employed in lineage systems, where most relationships of this kind are phrased agnatically. Among the south-eastern Bantu, however, the relationship between lineage segments founded by paternal half-brothers is defined in terms of their mothers' position as co-wives. Among some central African peoples, this process has been carried even further than

[2] Gluckman, 'Modern Zululand', pp. 147-54.

function and authority was largely evolved and built up during the Ngoni migration across the Zambesi and the early settlement in Nyasaland.

The office of the Paramount was supported by three typical Ngoni institutions. The first was the regency exercised by the man who was held responsible for the care of the office of the Paramount. He was called 'the one who takes care of the country', 'the one who has to put the new *indoni* in his place', 'the one who takes care of the young *indoni* until he enters his father's place'. We shall see later how this principle of regency operated in particular cases in the succession to the Paramountcy. It proved to be an effective provision both in the case of a minor who was recognized as his father's heir, and during an interregnum while the succession was being discussed. The Ngoni showed a clear understanding of what functions the regent ought to perform, and when he exceeded these functions and usurped, or tried to usurp, the Paramount's position they condemned his action as wrong.

The second institution which supported the Paramountcy was the 'big house' from which the heir to the Paramount had to come. We shall see later that it was not always considered essential that the heir should be the actual child of the wife in the big house. A boy could be adopted into the house and, by Ngoni kinship rules, he was then a child of that house and of the woman in it.

The third institution, which made the Paramount immortal at death after having been supreme in his life-time, was the Ngoni practice of 'guarding his spirit' in a hut, usually in the village where he had lived. The guardianship of a spirit was not practised exclusively for the Paramount. All the chiefs and the heads of the Swazi clans had this provision made for their spirits when they died, but in national crises prayers addressed to the spirits of former Paramounts were of supreme importance.

The royal clan and the big house

Among the Swazi and trans-Zambesi clans which formed the Ngoni aristocracy the royal clan had a unique position. Not only was it the clan of the Paramount, but its members had social rank and prestige because they belonged to his clan. In the northern kingdom informants showed awareness of the fact that their royal clan of Jere was not one of the well-known clans in the south. Other clan names found among them, such as Ngwenzulu, Thole, Naima, Ngumaya, and many more, were known to be clan names among the South-eastern Bantu. The following explanation was given by Chimtibo about the name Jere and was the one most widely accepted:

> The Ngoni themselves say that the clan name of Jere was given during the journey, and that it arose out of the number of people who were with Zwangendaba. When the Ngoni want to speak of a large number of people they use two well-known words which are: '*Nge Jindele*' (it is finished),

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
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'Mpa Jere' (it is Jere). Perhaps Zwangendaba and others took their clan name from this, seeing that they had become a great number. It is certain that the clan name of Jere is not known in Zululand or Swaziland.

In the northern kingdom all the chiefs recognized as Subordinate Native Authorities were of the royal clan, and hence its political authority was widespread. It was noticed by the early missionaries in northern Nguniland that the sons of Zwangendaba who were chiefs under their brother, the Paramount, showed some degree of independence in that they wanted to rule their own areas with the minimum of centralized control. The pre-eminence of the Paramount among the other Jere rulers was strengthened as time went on by the remoter kinship relationship of the other Jere chiefs to the Paramount. After Zwangendaba's death they were his brothers of the same father and different mothers. Two generations later they were further removed from his kinship circle since each of their posts was inherited on a direct father to son principle. The political and social importance of membership of the royal clan tended to go in the direct line of relationship to the Paramount rather than to the collateral branches. Later, in Part III, we shall examine the social prestige of the *amakosana* (lit. children of the inkosi). It was the closeness of their relationship to the reigning Paramount which was the basis for their social prestige, though evidence showed that a sister or brother or child from a big house of a former Paramount was also given social recognition as an important personage.

The royal clan of Maseko in the central kingdom was also known in Swaziland. Dr. Kuper refers to it in connexion with the Swazi custom of cremating the body of the Maseko chief at his death on a rock by a river.[1] This custom was brought from the south by the Ngoni under Maseko leadership and carried out for each successive Paramount up to 1891. Among these Ngoni the royal clan had special relationships with other leading clans, but the Paramount did not share his political authority with any others of his clan. His chiefs were all of other clans, and Ngoni informants said that it was a deliberate act of the Paramount Mpezeni to exclude his brothers from political authority and from disputing with him the control of the kingdom. In the isolated position thus established for the royal clan, two other clans had a ritual relationship with the Paramount. One was the Phungwako clan which was custodian of the Paramount's 'medicines', known as the *tenga*. The other was the Nguni clan which provided the companion for the Paramount whom I have called the 'royal shadow' (see below, pp. 61–3). Yet another special relationship with the royal clan was that of the Ntungu clan which had *ukuli*, or brotherly relations, with the Maseko clan, that involved sharing the same avoidances and excluded inter-marriage.

The relationship of the Paramount to other leaders of the royal clan

[1] Kuper, H. *An African Aristocracy*, p. 96.

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
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was thus different in the two kingdoms. In the north he was one ruler, though a supreme one, among several ruling kinsmen of the same clan. His position in the past had been strengthened by the prestige shared by his clansmen, but also challenged by his near kinsmen in positions of authority. In the central kingdom the Paramount shared no authority with his fellow clansmen. He was unique among them as a ruler, while sharing special ritual relationships with the two other clans which supported his position without challenging it.

A new Paramount, in order to be installed in his father's place, had to be of the big house as well as of the royal clan. Dr. Kuper described the Swazi practice whereby cattle were contributed by the nation for the mother of the king, so that she was called the 'mother of the people of the country'. She also described the ritual marriage of the first wife of a ruler, who was called *sindlunkiti*, and who was never the mother of the heir.[1] The Ngoni Paramount-elect in the northern kingdom married his first wife when he was a young man and she was called *mudumsisi*, 'the one who takes the darkness off him'. The big wife, who would bear the heir, was married with a large gift of cattle taken from the herd of the big wife of the reigning Paramount and, after marriage, was attached to her big house. We shall discuss in greater detail in the next chapter the relationships of the royal women to the Paramount and to each other. Here it is important to note that the big house owned by the big wife was the place where the future chief was brought up. In the central kingdom the first marriage of the Paramount was traditionally with a woman of the Magagula clan who was said not to bear children. She held an honoured place in the social hierarchy and was married with cattle taken from the herd of the *gupo* house of the reigning Paramount. It was regarded as a ritual marriage, for if she did bear children they were not acknowledged. Informants were uncertain whether methods to prevent conception were used, or whether abortion was practised, or whether children, if born, died young or were disposed of or placed out in other households. The last alternatives were unlikely, and one of the first two expedients was in line with the phrase always used of this wife: 'she did not bear children'. The wife who bore the heir was married next and was always of another leading clan, and the cattle for her came from the herd of the big house of the reigning Paramount.

The reasons were obvious why the remembered genealogies of the Ngoni Paramounts of the royal clans were short compared with the genealogies of some other African royal houses. The remote ancestors of Jere chiefs and Maseko chiefs, who were, as we have seen, not Paramounts before they left the south, were forgotten once the departure had taken place. Only a few names had been handed down and were repeated by the official praisers, whose task it was to call out the names of the direct ancestors of the Paramount before declaiming his *izibongo* or

[1] Kuper, H. *op. cit.* pp. 34 & 40.

we dammed the stream and made a pool and a mound. And we put him on a rock, and on top of him we put cowhide shields and left them so. And we put firewood above. Then Ngwazi Ngozo took fire and lit that fire. Then *ligubo* was danced and the women were singing. They sang songs of *ligubo* and the *amadoda* danced (*amagiya*). The owner of the country did not cry, no, and the big people did not cry. Only the wives and other women cried.

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Habuya Dube added later that everyone came with one piece of wood and put it on the pyre; and that they killed a cow and took the fat and put it on the wood, and used the skin to wrap the body in.

In discussing the ceremony of cremation with informants among the central Ngoni, there was no reference to the suggestion made by Dr. Kuper, that cremating was a substitute for embalming to avoid the corruption of the body of the king. They regarded the act of burning as an essential element in the continuing strength of the royal line, since the heir stood in the smoke from the pyre, and in the continuing fertility and strength of the country, since the ashes were swept into the river. The concept was that the royal ruler had been strengthened with the *tonga* medicine, and thereafter his body and its strength was the symbol of the unity and strength and fertility of his country.

On the question of mourning or no mourning they were equally emphatic. 'Death cannot cut life' was an expression often on their lips during the funeral ceremonies of Bambo Mangs, when great care was taken to carry out the traditional ritual as far as possible in every detail. They were shocked at the idea of mourning and wailing at such a time by any of the big people. The leading Ngoni women were expected to join the *ligubo* dances in the courtyard. Some old women of lower social rank in the village, together with the daughter of Bambo Mangs, sat in the house with the corpse sobbing and crying '*Mayi, mayi*' and many of them became quite ill and others hysterical with prolonged sobbing. The leading Ngoni men were contemptuous of this display of grief. They admitted it was correct behaviour for her daughter because of the close kinship tie, but of the behaviour of the rest they said 'Ha, just like the Nyumbo people.' The only behaviour which was considered correct was to dance in the courtyard openly before the house of Bambo Mangs, or to slip off quietly home and rest before returning to take up the dance.

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The traditional ritual procedure at the death of the Paramount, with the exception of the cremation of the corpse, I saw in all its details at the death of Bambo Mangs. The corpse was placed in the same position in the hut as described at Cikusi's death, and was wrapped in a sheep-skin first with a cow-skin over, the spleen, gall-bladder and fat decorating the head and neck. The dancing of *ligubo* by the men with shields and spears, and by the women, was continuous from the moment of death to the burial, and afterwards whenever fresh companies from the central

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Praises of Hlacwayo, son of Magangata

Hlacwayo the dwarf who cannot trail his cloth
Whereas the tall people trail their cloths.
Meat eaten with knives of axes,
If it is not eaten with forks it is rotten.
Hlacwayo whose bodily vigour is finished off compared with Hlacwayo of former times.
Grass of deep red colour is not burned with burning; it burns very slowly, drop by drop.

Praises of Ngwana, son of Gogwani

You who cut the trees and who cut the mouths,
You the locust, the grasshopper who fixed in your hair the feathers of the locust,
Who went below and climbed up, and went to bring the morning star of the dawn,
You go, since you are rejected; you go and bring the amulets of wild animals; those of cattle will be much disputed.
You who remember the fault of long ago.
In descending, you descend together into the mountains.
You who drank the blood of cattle,
You who separated from the people of Shaka, Shaka of Mhelebele kraal,
You who separated from the people of Nyathi the son of Mashobane; it thundered, it was cloudy.
Thou resemblest cattle which were finished by wolves.
You who originated with the people of Mailikazi,
You who originated with the people of Mpakaza son of Lidonga,
You who originated with the people of Ndwandwe.

CHAPTER III

THE ROYAL WOMEN

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An early traveller in central Ngoniland in 1886 remarked on the number of 'true Ngoni women' to be found there, who were 'easily distinguished from the other women by their light colour and by being taller and smarter'. He went on to say: 'The king's houses at Loviniti were 30 feet in diameter, built within an enclosure with other huts where the attendants lived. All were kept very clean and well swept.' This tribute to the appearance and achievements of Ngoni women of high rank was borne out by my own observations in the 1930's in central and northern Ngoniland. There was a definite physical type, light in colour, with high cheek-bones and orthognathic profile, tall with an upright carriage of the head. Women with these physical characteristics were in all cases of leading Nwasi or trans-Zambezi clans, and their influence on their

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
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142 S65 surroundings, their families, and the behaviour of those for whom they were responsible was most noticeable. Not all of these women were in the category of royal women, nor did all the royal women conform to this distinctive physical type, though the association of high-ranking family, physical appearance and pride of bearing was striking.

G44 S65 There were three main classes of royal women, all associated with the Paramount in a special relationship. These showed some parallels with the classes of royal women among the Swazi described by Dr. Kuper. I have not adopted her terms for distinguishing them, with the exception of the term Queen Mother, which I have used in the English sense of the widow of a former ruler and mother of the existing ruler. The chief women associated with the Paramount in the Ngoni kingdoms were the Royal Sister, the Queen Mother, and the big wife. This same association of three leading women with a ruling chief or *nduneumu* was found in the subordinate chiefdomships under the Paramount, and in the head villages of the Swazi and trans-Zambesi clans. It was a definite Ngoni pattern, associating women of high rank with the men who carried political responsibility. Their positions in the Ngoni patrilineal and virilocal social structure was markedly different from the position of the leading women in the matrilineal and uxorilocal societies of other Nyasaland peoples, especially in their relationship to their husbands, sons and brothers.

G44 S93 The relationships of the Queen Mother and the big wife to the Paramount were of a different character from that of the Royal Sister to her brother, since she was of the royal clan and they were not. We shall first consider the position in the Ngoni kingdoms of the Queen Mother and the big wife, since reference has been made to them already in the previous chapter. In the new *kumpalo* village of the Paramount there was a close connexion between the Queen Mother, who moved out with him, and his own big wife. His big wife was of the same house as the Queen Mother, since the cattle for her *lobolo* had been taken from the herd of the Queen Mother. At this time of moving out into the new village the big wife began to be head of her own house. Other wives, married with cattle from the herd which had been built up for her, and kraaled with those belonging to the Queen Mother, were attached to her house, and their huts were built near her own. She was the mother, actual or potential, of the future Paramount. If she failed to have a male child, or if her sons died, a male child would be taken from another wife's hut and brought up in her hut and would be known as the child of her house. Since she was the mother of the heir she had a special relationship to the *indewo* appointed to look after her house. It was the house of the Paramount elect and also she would probably, when the Queen Mother died, succeed to the ownership of the *indlunkulu* hut. Her *indewo* would then become one of the most important men in the village as he would receive all guests and strangers.

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
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guardianship of his father's spirit, or she could take over the *inflimbulo* while a co-widow of the Queen Mother inherited the guardianship of the spirit in her own hut. The second alternative was the one followed in all the instances remembered by informants. In both kingdoms the spirits of the main line of the Paramounts were guarded by someone appointed to that task, chosen on the grounds of reputation and reliability. There was yet another variant in the central kingdom, where, as we have seen, it was Manga, the daughter of Mpeta, who succeeded to her mother's guardianship of his spirit. The one principle which emerged from a number of cases cited in both kingdoms, was that occupancy of the *inflimbulo* and guardianship of a spirit might be undertaken by the same person, but generally it did not work out that way.

The Royal Sister, a title equivalent to the English Princess Royal, was the elder full sister of the Paramount by the same mother, or his elder sister by his father's big wife if she had borne no son. She was always referred to as 'the one who would have been chief if she had been a man'. She stood in a special relationship to the reigning Paramount and to the Paramount-elect. She was in constant touch with the Paramount's children who used the name *dadabasi* (female father) when addressing her or referring to her. Dr. Kuper [1] reported that the Royal Sister among the Swazi was addressed by the same term, and that she came next in rank to the big wife and the leading wives. My informants and my own observations in both Ngoni kingdoms put the Royal Sister next to the big wife and before the other wives. She visited the royal village at frequent intervals to see her brother and his children, and was consulted about their affairs. She took a leading part in the puberty ritual for the daughters of her brother and was prominent at *ligudo* and other dances, and at mourning ceremonies. She was married with an exchange of cattle to a man of a leading Swazi or trans-Zambezi clan, and during his lifetime lived in his village, visiting the royal village often.

The position of the royal women in the Ngoni kingdoms has been discussed in terms of the sister, mother and big wife of the Paramount. The same relationships were found in the families of the chiefs and headmen. There the equivalent of the Royal Sister was the elder full sister by the same mother of the chief or headwoman, and his own big wife and his father's big wife played similar roles, within their own spheres, to those played in the Paramount's village by the Queen Mother and his big wife.

Five texts follow which illustrate the life and activities of leading women who filled roles equivalent to those of Royal Sister, big wife and Queen Mother. One of the texts is by a Royal Sister—Bandesi Mangu, who was the sister of Paramount Chiwai in the central kingdom. Margaret Jere was the elder full sister of the heir to the chieftainship of

[1] Kuper, H. *op. cit.* p. 40.

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
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Chief Mtwalo II in the northern kingdom. Two texts are by former big wives of leading men. NyaNsanga was the former big wife of a grandson of Zwangendaba, a member of the royal clan but not a chief, though he owned many villages. Naidumbo was the former big wife of the head of the Nsanga clan in the central kingdom. The last text by Cibambo gives details of the clothes worn by royal women and leading women in pre-European days, some of which were still in use in the 1930's.

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Life of the Royal Women
by Mango Mzeko

daughter of Mpezeni, former Paramount of the central kingdom

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I Formerly I was just staying for I did not work. I had many slaves and their work was especially to thread beads. Up to today I have not worked except to cook. Our hair we anointed with the fat of cows and of milk. Our food was milk and we drank it in a wooden cup. We were getting cloth when they sold slaves to the Arabs. For honouring each other, the big men were telling the paths: 'You should honour the big people that the country may be rich. Only the big women were dancing ngoma, mdudo and ligubo. If a man married the child of a chief, he gave many cattle, and the poor man could not marry the child of a chief.

When NaMlangeni was alive she was a well-known chief and was greatly honoured. When making a case, they called her that she might judge. When people went to war and captured slaves and cattle they were giving them to her, and she divided them. For thanking her they said: 'Zambewa Mbai.'

Life of the Royal Women
by Margaret Jere

granddaughter of Mtwalo I, daughter of Johannes Jere in the northern kingdom

I When I was a child I was not allowed to go out quickly in the sun, and when crawling I had to stay in the house. I was very light coloured. The eldest (nsewa girl) took me very mother, UNsabani Naima, to be suckled at special times. I slept in thehouse of Magwalire Moyo, my grandmother, who was the widow of Chief Mtwalo. The isidumbani (attendant) also slept there. My grandmother and others, the nsewa (senior women), were telling me how to behave. Aspecial isidumbani living in Magwalire's house was told by my grandmother to speak specially to me when I had reached puberty. This isidumbani could speak to me about anything. When nearing marriage a woman was chosen, UNsewaya Naima, and sent to reveal to me how I was to live in my married state. The sisters of my father, Tizuiwe and Sayoya Jere, also assisted spoke to me at the time of my marriage. UNsewaya Naima was set by my grandmother to examine me (for virginity) before marriage, was allowed to play with those children who lived in the same section of te village and who were known to my mother and grandmother. The isidumbani did all the work but sometimes I used to pound and fetch water, as not too hard and just for pleasure.

When strangers came, I saw and saluted them and then went out of

159 565 631 644 the house. If my father came to my mother's house, I would go out, but if he sent for me I would return and he would talk to me and play with me. We learned how to behave well, and were rebuked if we behaved badly. My father would beat a child for not behaving well. My father did not allow his children to be spoiled by being treated differently from others. He said: 'They are all my children.'

Life of the Royal Women
by Mdingane Nsengu

widow of Chinondo Jere, grandson of Zwangendaba in the northern kingdom

665 631 644 [302] ¶ The *amakosikazi* were not working. During the day they kept dressing their hair, both the young women and the old. The old women no longer kept their *isikhatu*, or high chignon, but wore the *umaxo*, or long curls. For the *umaxo* the hair was cut short and not allowed to grow very long. Instead of dressing it upwards they took a blade of grass and kept it pressed down after oil and scent were applied. Their other work was to go to the river and wash.

They also drank beer and some gruel, and afterwards danced *ngoma* in the house where beer was brewed. The men and chief also joined in the *ngoma* and the women were responding to the singing. They began to drink in the morning until the afternoon, but not in the evening. Other people went on drinking until evening, and even some of the *amakosikazi* who were *isidli* (gluttonous) but the rest were sleeping or resting.

When drinking in the house the chief always sat by the right-hand door-post, and the big *inkosikazi* by the left-hand post. They sat near the door to draw breath easily because there were many people inside. The beer-pot being set halfway between the door and the hearth-stones in the centre, a man was chosen to pour the beer in the gourds for drinking. He was *umtshi wamvumbi*, the beer pourer, and was often the village *induna* or one who was favoured by the chief. When the gourds were full he told the chief, and the chief told him to distribute them. Sometimes there were four or even six for the different classes in the house. They sat in order, the *inkosi* with the *izinduna zami amandabi*, and the *inkosikazi* with the other wives of the chief and the wives of the *izinduna zami amandabi*. The chief and the *inkosikazi* kept on inviting the common people to come and drink. [672] Such invited people thanked the person at the beginning and at the end, others joining him. The *inkosikazi* or other wives of the chief were thanked 'Nkosi'.

The *amakosikazi* never worked at all, but the lesser wives worked, and pounded grain and fetched firewood. Those were the ones who had not yet got attendants in their houses. All the chief *amakosikazi* had attendants who performed all the work of the house. The *amakosikazi* often sat in the *ocwandeni* or outside under the platform of branches supported by posts. [673] There they ate their food which was *ilombezi* and *umqingili*, thick gruel of millet; *izinkwa ze ngwani*, bricks made ground to a paste; or *izinkobe*, whole grains of maize boiled and pounded. The meat was eaten as a feast on the *igwakeni*, the smeared place in front of the house, and all the chief's wives joined in. A mat was spread for the big *amakosikazi* where they sat

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when eating meat. The lesser wives sat on the ground, which was cleaned and smeared often with cow's dung.

The second *indumo* of the village was the one who put the meat on the *ingwenshe*, or big platter of the *inhosikazi*, and placed it before her. She herself or her *ukhonzi* (co-wife) divided the meat for the other women, the wife of the *indumo* helping her. After they had eaten, each *inhosikazi* called for an *ingwenshe* from her house for the meat to be given to her attendants.

The Life of the Royal Women
by NaNdumbu
formerly the big wife of the late Chief Njokomolo Nyongo I in the central kingdom

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¶ Old Njokomolo had many wives, great and small. His huts were well made, and in the middle was the 'big house'. They made a fence to go round all the huts, and its appearance was very good.

He was fond of sitting on the *bundo*, and all his wives cooked maize and took many baskets to the *bundo*. He himself ate alone, but afterwards gave food to the big people and they in turn to the children who were waiting on the *bundo*. If a stranger came, he did not lack food, for the chief gave food to strangers and later. So all strangers praised his behaviour. And he was known far and wide in the land for his comely behaviour.

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When the days for *ngoma* were near he was going to the stores to buy many cloths to divide them to all his wives. Especially he was giving them to NaNdumbu his big wife to divide. Those cloths were all of one kind. On the day of dancing *ngoma* all the women were those cloths and came on the *bundo* with the chief. The people were astonished to see the women dressed alike. Njokomolo excelled among all the people, and all praised him.

In the hut of NaNdumbu there were girls to sweep and to pound, and NaNdumbu was just sitting, no pounding for her.

Njokomolo was very fond of hunting and when he killed animals in the hunt he divided them among his wives. Then he died and left his wives. From that time his wives have been very poor, and some have gone away to their own homes. Those who are here have been married by other men. Although the men dance *ngoma*, those women cannot dance it because they were greatly praised when they danced with fine clothes, but they cannot dance with poor clothes, no. So when people dance they just look on. Those women can dance *ngoma* in other villages, but here in their own village, no. Because they grieve very much to see the tomb of their husband who was dancing with them.

The Customs of Women
by Yesaya Chimimbo

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¶ Today Ngoni women are not easily recognized because they have taken foreign customs of clothing. Long ago Ngoni women were easily distinguished by their hair. They did not shave their hair except when their husband died. It was washed carefully and oiled and combed upwards to the top of the head in the *isikhato*. The oil was *ijubla*, clarified butter. This was done every two or three days, or every day if they were grand women. They decorated it with small strings of beads dangling from a

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there stuck at the top of the *ishlulu*, and round it they put narrow bands of beads (*intsoyeye* and *isiwesuye*) arranged in layers. Royal women were leopard and lion claws among the beads. Round the neck and on the arms they wore coils of brass wire (*amasongo*) which they got from the Arabs, or *isipote*, strings of beads wound round a piece of cloth. The kilt of soft dressed leather (*isidwaba*) reached from the waist to the knee, and wrapped well over. A long piece of soft leather (*ingubu*) was fastened on the left shoulder and reached a little below the knees. On the edges of the *ingubu* were fastened small bells made of brass (*ngqwasi*). Ngoni women did not like to cut their bodies with tattoo marks. They said it was ugly. The *inkosikazi* might decorate other wives at the *ngoma* dance because she had a large store of beads and wire and leather cloths.

The common features of the life of leading women as illustrated in these texts were: the number of attendants and servants in their households and their consequent freedom from manual work; the etiquette surrounding life in the *indlunkulu* and the big house, and the formality of hospitality, beer-drinks and dances; relationships with their *indewu*, and with their husbands, and, as illustrated by Margaret Jere, with the paternal grandmother who supervised their upbringing when they were young.

In addition to the *indewu* in charge of the big house, the royal women and leading women in the villages of chiefs and *abenumzane* were surrounded by a number of young girls and serving women. These were known in pre-European days as domestic slaves or servants (*mizitho*), girl companions (*inkhenkeme*), nurse girls (*ukwi*) and older women attendants (*ogogo*). Informants said that in pre-European days there were fifteen or twenty girls in each royal household and the number was constantly being added to when female slaves were captured in war and allocated as servants to the Paramount's wives. All the texts in this chapter refer to the fact that the royal women and the leading women did no work, and there was always a nostalgic refrain from senior women informants about the time devoted to hair-dressing and beauty treatments, to 'just sitting', and to dancing and drinking beer, while all the household tasks and the care of the children fell to the servants. The Ngoni royal women, even in the 1930's, commanded the labour of six to ten women and girls in each household. The hard physical work of fetching firewood and water, pounding grain, preparing vegetables and often cooking too, was done largely by servants in the Paramount's and chief's villages where I stayed. There were young nurse girls and older women to help with the children and with the adolescent girls. There were no longer any domestic slaves, and the domestic helpers, who were often distant relatives of the wives, appeared to enjoy the prestige of being attached to an important house.

The royal women in pre-European days were distinguished by the clothes and ornaments they were which were reserved for the royal

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clan and for women of leading Swazi and trans-Zambezi clans. Two of the terms emphasized the distinction conferred on the royal women by special clothing. Cibamba described the use of well-dressed soft skins and of beads and wire, the beads brought with them from the south, the brass wire obtained from the Arabs. In NeNdumba's text she mentioned cloth bought from the stores. After the Ngoni women gave up wearing soft leather for skirts and the long piece of leather draped from the left shoulder, they used strong cotton cloth of dark blue or black, originally brought by the Arabs and later stocked by the stores. They tied the main cloth under their arms in a draped knot over the breast and on ceremonial occasions they added another fastened on the left shoulder like a plaid. A woman who had been a young girl in the village of Paramount Cikusi, but was not of a leading clan, said that in this village there was a great difference between the royal women and the rest: 'Only the daughters of Cikusi and his big wives could wear dark cloth as the Ngoni do. The others would have been killed if they tried to look like the big women'.

The royal women and the big wives and widows of chiefs and sikhosana were treated by all with whom they came in contact with the distinction and respect due to their prestige. They were addressed and thanked by the term *Nkosi*, with the clan name and the honorific prefix added, except where, as in the case of Bambo Mzuga, a title had been conferred. She was thanked '*Nkosi Bambo*',[1] *Ukukhonjwa*, and its Nyanja equivalent *kulemekeza*, meaning to honour and to behave in a respectful manner towards senior people and those of superior rank, was an expression constantly used by the Ngoni and by the other peoples in the Ngoni kingdoms. The forms of showing respect were partly verbal; partly in the position adopted, with the eyes cast down and a slight curtsey by the women when facing someone; partly in the tone of voice when speaking; and partly in the deliberate and controlled behaviour noticed by several early travellers in Nyasaland. A particular verbal form of respect practised by the royal women was the use of the *Ishonjwa* vocabulary. I found this practice surviving only in the Emtshwezi area in northern Ngamiland where the Ngoni language was still spoken, but informants said that it had been common to all married women of trans-Zambezi clans in the northern kingdom when they had spoken Ngoni among themselves. The *Ishonjwa* vocabulary consisted of the substitution of special words, known only to the women, in order to avoid using a word in which the main syllable of a man's name occurred—a man with whom they were connected by marriage or by official relationship.[2] Thus Zwangendaba's wives and widows could

[1] *Bambo* (father) was a term of respect used for important senior men.

[2] *Ishonjwa* as a form of special vocabulary was widely practised among the Ngoni groups in South Africa. Hunter, M. W. 'Social Organization', in *The Bantu-speaking Tribes of South Africa*, pp. 74, 75.

2: Read E-S (1935-1939) 1956
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never use any word in which *indaba* (meeting or affair) occurred. They substituted *inxapo* for *indaba* and spoke of him as Zwangendaba. The women of the Nguninzolo clan could never use the word *ilanga* (sun) for which they substituted *jiba*, since Langa was the name of the father of Zwide who had married into the Nguninzolo clan.

Though the particular verbal form of *hlonipa* which the Ngoni royal women brought from the south survived only in one area of northern Nguniland, the concept inherent in it and the attitudes of honour and respect which it implied were expressed in the use of *Nkosi* in thanking and in the other non-verbal forms already mentioned. Mangu, the Royal Sister of Cikusi, was as we have seen, thanked '*Nkosi Bandu*' but also with the formula '*Zikosi wotsuwa wankosi*' (thanks, child of the Paramount). Among the central Ngoni there were two expressions of thanks which were probably a relic of *hlonipa* vocabulary since they were used only by the leading women. The customary form of thanking, and of taking leave after a conversation or after getting a reply to a question, was '*Zikosi*' with the clan name and honorific prefix added. The royal women in this area, when making the response to this form of thanking, always replied '*Zaitosi*' with the clan name, and they thanked each other by '*Zimata*' with the clan name instead of '*Zikosi*'. When I observed this and used it myself, they nudged each other and said 'She also is one of us.'

We have discussed so far the outward signs of respect shown to the royal women, and the visible marks of distinction in their clothes and the number of their attendants. We shall now examine the way in which the authority of the royal women was exercised. This will give some indication of their relationship to the political organization of the kingdoms, in so far as they had certain responsibilities to the people as a whole, and to their husbands and sons within the royal village where they lived. At the royal village the Queen Mother and her co-widows shared with the wives of the two leading houses to the right and left of the *indlunkulu*, the responsibility for preparing and serving food and beer for the Paramount and those whom he called to eat with him. The text by Nyalwanga[1] describes the etiquette of beer drinking in one of the chiefdoms in the northern kingdom, of sending food to the chief when he ate in the cattle kraal, and of assembling the wives in order of precedence according to their houses to take their food. The formality of this etiquette was characteristic of Ngoni eating and drinking, and it was maintained by the organization and forethought of the royal women, the big wives and mothers of the Paramount, who planned the work of their own households and supervised that of the lesser wives who were attached to the two main houses.

[1] The procedure described in the text applied equally to the Paramount's village and to the villages of ruling chiefs. The Ngoni to this day used the term '*inkosi*' for chief as well as for Paramount.

all their things. Even when the Paramount agreed that a man should be killed he ordered that all his possessions were to come to him, stock, slaves, wives and children. These were called *inini nenkosi*, the things of the Paramountcy and they were divided among the houses of the Paramount, and the master of the man killed got nothing. This was done to teach the headmen of the villages that they should not denounce their people to death because they coveted their goods or people. The Paramount taught them by taking all the belongings of the one killed and they got nothing. Of course the Paramount's and chiefs' villages grew quickly in this way. At the beginning the punishment for adultery and murder was death; in adultery both the man and the woman were killed. Beginning from the time of Mbelwa and Mtwalo the penalty for adultery has been changed. The man who did it was despoiled of his goods or paid compensation. The courts agreed that any man wronged by such adultery could go with a war-party to the village of the guilty man and take what he wanted, but not kill any person. The Paramount took no notice of such an affair.

No account of the conduct of cases in Ngoni courts would be complete without reference to the popular interest in and support for the law. After a day in the courts the *inindawo* and the *amakhosi* talked of almost nothing else. They went over and over the details of the cases, and recalled former cases of a similar kind and compared the judgements given. They criticized each other sharply for the handling of cases, and such criticism was taken well on the whole, as a contribution to the process of interpreting and enforcing the law rather than as a personal affront. The attendance of the public at the court sessions was encouraged so long as they observed due decorum. When talking broke out among the onlookers, the *indawo* in charge bellowed 'Silence' in a voice of thunder. If a group of women continued to chatter and giggle after the *indawo* had called for silence, he told them to go home. The interest in courts and cases extended to the play of children and to the conduct by the boys of their own affairs in the *lomuni* or boys' dormitory. I often saw the young son of a chief or *indawo* organizing his playmates into a court and allocating roles to them and in his play imitating the voice and gestures of his father.

Ngoni office-holders

In Chapter II of Part I we stated that the main element in the Ngoni political system in the 1930's was a ruling aristocracy supported by a hierarchy of officials. In this chapter we shall first look at two texts, one by Cibamba on the northern kingdom and the other by a big *indawo* in the central kingdom, explaining the relationship of the different office-bearers to the Paramount. We shall see how there were in effect two groups of office-bearers, one related to the territorial divisions of the kingdoms, and the other consisting of state or national officials and those connected with the royal village. There was no set of terms which could

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CHAPTER I

NGONI SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

A BRIEF review was given in Chapter III of Part I of the main elements of Ngoni culture, analysed into 'patterns' covering kinship, village layout, ritual, ceremonial, and language. In this section we shall be considering the principal social institutions embodying Ngoni culture: their clans, houses, families and age sets. We shall find evidence in the two kingdoms of an extensive common element in the social organization which the Ngoni brought with them from the south. Some important diversities will be evident also, such as the variations in virilocal residence found in the central kingdom, and the less widespread practice there of *lobolo* marriage. Those elements which were common to Ngoni social organization in both kingdoms were often those which distinguished Ngoni culture from that of the neighbouring peoples. Patrilineal descent, the house system, the ranking of clans, the *lineni* organization of boys' life and activities—these were all distinctively Ngoni, practised by families of Swazi and trans-Zambezi clans, and sometimes adopted by individuals and families of other clans who had been associated with the Ngoni over long periods. Nevertheless, in many of the villages of the central kingdom there were clearly two cultures existing side by side: the Ngoni culture being that of an aristocratic minority and the local culture that of the majority, who in the kingdom were equally subjects of the Paramount but in their villages possessed inferior social status.

Indications were to be seen, even in the more conservative and more isolated northern kingdom, that modern influences were affecting Ngoni social institutions. We have already noticed some of the effects of the cessation of warfare on a social system founded on military traditions. The exodus of young men from Ngoni villages to seek work elsewhere was very extensive, especially in the northern kingdom, where the level of education was higher but employment was not available, and this had repercussions on the age of marriage, the distribution of wealth, and the undertaking of family responsibilities, including the care of the old people. The gradual decline in polygyny, largely but not entirely due to the work of missions, was beginning to have its effects on the working of the house system and on the interrelations of the generations within the family group.

In the 1930's many of these modern changes were appearing but the traditional institutions were still functioning, and the Ngoni leaders themselves were clear about those forms and activities which were distinctively their own.

Households[1]

	Total	Leading clan
Northern Nyasaland		
Ewenini	83	13
Endindeni	15	10
Ekhwengeni	37	21
Central Nyasaland		
Chikwita	39	18
Mangwira	60	26
Mzukuzuka	110	37

The proportion of persons of Swazi and trans-Zambezi clans in the central kingdoms to the total population was lower than in the north. The figures given here, however, do not show the total number of persons of Swazi and trans-Zambezi clans, but only the households related on a kinship basis with the leading clan head.

Ewenini and Endindeni were both built in traditional Ngoni style in horse-shoe formation round a single kraal, with the *indlunkulu* at the head of the kraal, and a recognized right-hand and left-hand grouping. Ewenini had become the head village of the Sibanda clan since its owner, Samson Sibanda, on his father's death had gone out from his father's village and made this his *kwenpala* village. His big wife, of the royal clan, was in the *indlunkulu* to which she had succeeded on the death of his mother, and there was another wife on the right and left hand. Of the older generation there was only one widow of his father, belonging to the same lineage as his mother. Of his generation there were five brothers, one of the same mother as Samson, and four sons of the surviving widow of his father. There was also the widow of a dead brother by the same mother. Two sisters of Samson were in the village, one married to the *induna* of his mother's house, whose family lived on the right-hand side of the kraal, and one a deserted widow who had returned to her brother's protection. All the village was one house, that of Samson's own mother.

Endindeni was a *gupo* village owned by Zibekaro Makwakwa who was the son of a famous war *induna* and was of the *gupo* house of his father. His brother, who was the son of the big house, had moved out to his own village. The village was composed entirely of his family with the exception of an age mate with whom he had an *ukuba* relationship, who lived with his two wives on the left-hand side of the kraal. Zibekaro's big wife was in the *indlunkulu* to which she had succeeded on the death of his own mother, and his second wife was also of her house. Of the older generation there was one widow of his father, and one widow of his father's brother; of his own generation, one younger brother of the same mother. There were four sons of his big wife and two of his second

[1] In all six villages the total number of households included two or more houses.

as belonging to the houses. The relatively large number of cattle and the high ranking of the Nzunga clan accounted for the number of Ndebele marriages.

Family structure in individual and group life

An individuals and in family groups members of leading Ngoni clans claimed and exercised leadership in their villages. The leading families in the area of a mchumamma owning a head village, and the small Ngoni family groups in a larger non-Ngoni setting, all expected and received 'honour' (ulemu). The tendency in the central kingdom to marry up, and in the northern kingdom to marry into the clan of the mother if it were a high-ranking one, emphasized the importance attached to the rank and prestige of certain clans. This attitude towards family prestige was more noticeable in the central kingdom where individuals were quick to enumerate who was their mother or wife if that information would enhance their reputation.

The leadership of high-ranking families was not only a matter of claiming prestige. It carried with it, on the male and the female side, responsibility for regulating the affairs of the village and the house and the bonja. Quarrels had to be composed, if possible before they came to court, troubles over deserted wives looked into, provision made for hospitality and for keeping the village premises in order. Informants emphasized again and again that in Ngoni villages where many men and women were of Swazi clans, order and cleanliness were to be expected. This was not always the case, but it was strikingly illustrated in two of the villages referred to in this chapter—Endindeni in the northern and Mzungusa in the central kingdom.

In day-to-day village affairs much mutual help was given by members of Ngoni families to each other, especially by the men to widowed mothers and sisters, and by the husband's brothers to wives whose husbands were away at work. The dislocation caused to the village economy by the emigration of males called for considerable organization on the part of those who were left. Ngoni male leaders of families and heads of a bonja, and the women heads of the houses, all had to include the needs of these 'deserted' women in their own planning. In the northern kingdom, in spite of its relative poverty, better care was taken of wives whose husbands were away because the strong virilocal tradition emphasized this type of help.

In rearing and training children the Ngoni family structure and relationships provided direction and responsibility. We shall discuss in the next chapter on age sets the significance of birth and puberty ceremonies in Ngoni life. More significant, however, than any ceremony was the continuous provision for the training of children, adolescents and young adults in correct behaviour. This duty fell on the women as far as young children and girls were concerned, and on the men for the

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some for themselves as their perquisite. They then drove the cattle to pasture, and this might be some distance away when grass was scarce in the dry season. They sometimes drove the cattle back near the village to rest at noon under the shade trees, but if the pasture was far away the cattle rested there and went on feeding later. They were brought back to the kraal in the late afternoon and counted by one of the senior men.

The herd-boys taught each other to fight with sticks, to wrestle, to catch rats and small birds, to use the knobkerry, catapults, and bows and arrows. Sometimes in the afternoon they went to other villages and challenged another herd to a fight between bulls.[1] During the long day's herding, the boys used to drink milk, make *amasi* (milk curds) in a gourd and eat it, bake birds in clay and roast ears of maize taken from their mothers' grain stores. Precedence among the herd-boys depended first on age and only secondly on the rank and position of the families they belonged to. There was an easily recognizable air of authority and almost of arrogance among the older boys responsible for their fathers' and uncles' cattle. They superintended the process of letting out the cattle, milking them, driving them to pasture and the return to the kraal in the evening. Mounted on donkeys, wearing large straw hats made by themselves, the senior boys acted like ranch owners bossing up inefficient work hands.

This period of living in the *lamosi* was, as we have seen, shared by boys of a wide age group. In a large village where there were two or three or four *lamosi*, there was often one in each section, which generally meant that the boys belonging to one *kanja* or section shared one *lamosi*. This had the effect of dividing them up to some extent on a basis of family and rank, but in a *lamosi* serving a whole village all the boys went in together whatever families they came from. There was no respecting of clan status in the *lamosi* and young boys of high-ranking families had to wait on and obey older boys of lower rank. *Lamosi* life was therefore a democratizing influence among the boys of the village, and no boys were excused from herding cattle because they belonged to a house which owned cattle. Even if some went to school and others did not, the school-boys had to take their share of herding in the holidays. Ngoni chiefs and leading men laid great emphasis on keeping the boys busy and making them carry out the work allotted to them. The older boys began to listen in at court cases and to discuss them among themselves. During the wet season from time to time they formed hoeing parties for clearing new ground and for the periodical weeding of gardens. They seldom did any continuous cultivation, as the women and the older men did, and a boy who liked to go off and hoe by himself was pointed out as one with rather peculiar tastes.

During this period of *lamosi* life, when in addition to herding the

[1] For the relation between the training of herd-boys and preparation for war, see Part II, Chap. I, p. 311.

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different pattern. They also went to sleep with a grandmother or some other older member of the family when they were old enough to be excluded from their mother's hut at night, and they shared with their small brothers the grandmother's care and her story-telling round the fire in the evenings. During the day the girls continued as part of their mother's household group, eating with her and the younger children. As little girls they were taught to sit down carefully and to smooth down the cloth which they wore round their waists. They were trained to speak correctly and to know the right forms of address, to greet strangers politely, to avoid touching their father's mats or bed, to eat tidily and with restraint. The emphasis was on exclusiveness for these high-born Ngoni girls, lest, as a result of mixing too freely with everyone, they should forget the teaching given and the behaviour which was expected of them. In contrast to their brothers' rigorous training in the *lawesi*, Ngoni girls, as they showed signs of approaching puberty, were guarded and looked after and instructed further in correct behaviour.

When a girl found that she was menstruating for the first time, she told one of her age mates and sent her to tell her *gogo*.[1] The *gogo* told her to stay in the hut during the period and showed her how to wear a cloth between her legs, which she had henceforth to wear always whether menstruating or not. She was told to sleep from now on in a different part of the hut from the smaller children and never to bathe with younger girls. At the end of her first period the girl was escorted to the women's bathing-place by her father's sisters and other female members of her father's family. She was made to wash in the stream and squat in the cold water while doing so. I saw more than one child trying to control her shivering while her relatives watched to see if she would be strong and brave, or weak and cowardly. When she was in the water she was made to face south-east—the quarter which the Ngoni called *kwathu* (our home). After this ceremony the girl's father and mother were informed, and her father informed the head of his *banja* and the head of the village. The news was greeted with rejoicing and made generally public.

From about the age of ten or eleven, the Ngoni girl belonged to an age set distinguished by a separate name. She was no longer included in the group of children, as were her brothers of the same age, but was marked out by belonging to the age set called *isikakasana* or *nabuthu*. After her first menstruation she belonged to the age set called *izintombi* or *anamwali*. From this stage, Ngoni girls were under the close supervision of the older women. The association of a *gogo* or older woman with each house in a Ngoni village meant that the girls of the house were under her special care, particularly after they had passed puberty. There

[1] *gogo* in this context is used for grandmother or for the elderly woman to whose care the girl was assigned.

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were clearly defined aims in this care of girls after puberty, including instruction in personal hygiene and in pre-marital sexual relations. A girl's father's sisters and her own mother wanted to be able to say, when marriage negotiations began: *Ngombe zake zidzula*, 'her cattle are full', which was the comment made when girls were examined periodically to see if they were still virgin. To achieve this they constantly said to her: '*Madzinenge, madzilete*', 'take care of yourself, control yourself'; and the *gogo* explained to the girl how she could protect herself. In one area where I lived, the chief's daughter was examined every week, with her *bzidzandzani* or companions, and the girls who helped in the big house were examined every month. The strict behaviour required of Ngoni girls of good family was expected also of those of the same age who were members of the same household, either appointed to be with them as companions or as servants in the big house.

Looking forward to marriage involved not only preservation of her virginity. An Ngoni girl going to a strange village had to know how to perform women's work in the home, how to do it herself as well as how to direct others, and she had to be carefully trained in that meticulous and exclusive social behaviour required of Ngoni women of good family. She might be going to marry a man who intended to 'marry up', in which case she might be thought in one sense to be 'marrying below her station'. Yet her personal position as a member of her father's clan and family could not be altered by her marriage, and she was well aware that she was conferring something on the man and on the family she married into.

While the boys were learning their roles in later life in the democratic atmosphere of the *lawozi* and of the boys' pursuits in the village, the girls in the later stage of their training after puberty were treated more individually, and were not left to find their level in a group of their age mates. The adult women took an active part in telling them how to behave, how to dress and how to cook. The girls of high-ranking families sometimes pounded maize with their age mates, singing as they did so, but more for fun than because their food depended on it. They learned to dress their hair and put on clothes, and to walk and dance in company with other girls, but always with the critical eye of their *gogo* upon them. Their lower-ranking companions could make mistakes and be careless, and walk and dance in an exaggerated fashion. Ngoni girls might never pass certain bounds of decorum, and the standard expected of them was high and exacting. I have heard *manina* of leading clans scold young girls many times for careless behaviour and badly done work.

In this training, as throughout that of the boys, there was a deliberate preparation for leadership. A girl's character and ability were being watched and, while an awareness of her personal dignity and position was being fostered, it was accompanied by requirements of obedience

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and docility, especially to older women. This last was intended to stand her in good stead when she went to be married in a strange village and would be expected to show submissiveness to her mother-in-law. At the same time, since the girl belonged to a high-ranking clan, she knew, and so did those who were training her, that she would eventually have to exercise authority and teach others what to do and show them how to do it. She would also be expected to have a mind of her own and to speak out on occasions to her husband and, when she grew older, to rebuke women in her house or in her service if they did anything amiss.

In pre-European days, between the private puberty ritual and her marriage, the Ngoni girl went through another ceremony, the *umsindo*. This was a pre-marriage rite, and was in many instances followed almost immediately by marriage. It was held for girls of high-ranking families, though their companions from their own and other villages shared in the ritual. The ceremony was abandoned after the missionaries came, but many of the songs and the dances were well-known to the leading Ngoni women. I saw many *umsindo* dances in the northern and central kingdoms and collected a number of the songs which were still in use, some sung to solo instruments, such as the *ipuluti*, and others sung at funerals or at tribal gatherings. These *umsindo* songs which referred to sexual intercourse and used expressions which were considered obscene, had been sung only at the ceremony itself. The Ngoni made a practice of referring to genital organs and to sexual intercourse in veiled language. As soon as the meaning of the terms became obvious, they were disguised by other allusive terms. The degree of obscenity in the actual words of songs was therefore very difficult to establish, but Ngoni informants were always clear about which could be sung in public and which only on occasions of licence or strictly in private.

The *umsindo* ceremony as a preliminary to marriage fulfilled certain functions. It was a public declaration that the girl for whom it was held had been examined and found to be a virgin, for it was not held for anyone who had been deflowered in earlier love affairs. It emphasized the social rank and the wealth of the girl's father, for only rich and important men could afford to hold *umsindo* for their daughters. It had a strong element of a *rite de passage* in it, for the girls were secluded in a hut during most of the ceremony, they fasted, they were given instruction by older women, and they were finally "brought out" of the hut and adorned with parts of the beasts slaughtered, and with beads given as presents by friends and relatives. Perhaps the chief significance of the *umsindo* was the fact that it was a ceremony held for the girl in her father's village. It was an assertion of her membership in her own family and village circle, and of her father's status and of his regard for her. There is no doubt that the Ngoni women of high rank had a keen sense of their own importance and position; the *umsindo* ceremony

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explained this, and was a reminder of their careful bringing up in their father's village surrounded by their attendant girls and older women.

Many of the *amitodo* songs referred to well-known events in Ngoni history. Others were warnings against jealousy when living in a polygynous household. One of these, said to be a lament of the women about the difficulties of polygynous households, was very popular in the northern kingdom and was used by Ngoni ministers in the churches when speaking against polygyny, even though the actual words of the song seemed to be referring to a historical event.

The boys and girls went through one common ceremony about the age of seven, when their second teeth were coming. The local tribes practised various forms of scarification, including facial tribal markings. The Ngoni never did this in the past and said that they despised it. Their distinctive marking was the piercing of the ear lobes in order to insert a small piece of reed, or a stud, or some beads. Formerly, when captives were taken in war, or when a village was conquered and annexed, the local people, especially the younger men, were forced to have their ears pierced as a condition of service in the regiments. After the Europeans came, the forcible ear-piercing was resisted by the local tribes, but among the Ngoni, especially those of trans-Zambesi days, it continued to be practised, and I saw it being carried out in several villages. It was done in the dry cold-weather months, usually by one of the senior women of the children's family or house, and included all the children of about the same age who wanted to have their ears pierced. The woman pierced the lobe with a thorn, or a needle if she had one, and threaded some cotton through the hole. A day or so later they put in tiny bits of grass and replaced these with larger and larger bits until the hole was considered the right size.

After this ear-piercing ceremony, the boys' and girls' groups developed on their separate lines until their members became interested in each other as members of the opposite sex. Then, as I said at the beginning of the chapter, the groups of youths and girls were the two most prominent age groups in a village. They paid great attention to their clothes, washed with sweet-smelling leaves, used fats to anoint their hair, and the girls wore bead ornaments in their hair and on neck and wrists. Thus adorned, they spent their leisure time, especially in the cold weather after harvest, visiting other villages, usually in separate groups of youths and girls, except when they went as a team to dance *ngoma* in a neighbouring village.

In the social life of young people in Ngoni villages, the *ngoma* dance played an important part, especially in the northern kingdom. It took place after the harvest and was organized on a 'village team' basis. The boys practised their dance outside the cattle kraal in the evenings, and the girls did their dancing by themselves as a rule. But on the occasion

CHAPTER I

THE ANCESTRAL SPIRITS AND THE ARISTOCRATIC TRADITION

This section is not an account of Ngoni religion. It would require a study in itself to examine their beliefs about supernatural beings, their ideas on cosmogony, their concepts of the causes of disaster and sickness, their approach to and practice of forms of magic, and their attitude to witchcraft. Living in Ngoni villages, listening to individuals of different ages discussing prosperity and disaster, the seen and the unseen, the known and the feared, it was clear that it would be difficult to isolate a comprehensive system of beliefs and say that these were distinctively Ngoni beliefs concerning religion and magic and witchcraft. The observer was always aware of the intermingling of ideas and practices from the many Nyasaland tribal peoples who lived side by side and were in constant contact with one another in all those spheres of thought and action which demanded explanation and some remedial or therapeutic treatment. Among the Nyasaland tribes in the 1930's the influence of sixty years of Christian teaching by the missions played an important part, since the missions had introduced western medicine and education as well as a new religion and ethic, and so had influenced both thinking and action among their converts and their families.

In this complex situation it was virtually impossible to say: this is the Cewa religion, this is the Tumbuka cosmogony, this is Nkamba magic. It was nevertheless clear that there was an Ngoni cult of their ancestral spirits, which was not shared, in the form in which they practised it, by any of the neighbouring peoples, and the Ngoni had their own admitted methods of relating it to Christian beliefs and practices. One reason why the Ngoni ancestor cult could be singled out as peculiar to them was its foundation in their aristocratic tradition. As long as the Ngoni political and social structure and organization survived, including the reciprocal rules of leading men and important women, the concept of houses with their ownership of cattle, and the role of the gape houses in maintaining tradition and carrying out ritual, the performance of the cult of ancestral spirits was assured. The eminent ancestors whose spirits were guarded in a village and who were known and remembered were addressed in times of trouble, and meat was offered to them as a form of sacrifice from the herd of cattle associated with the house to which they had belonged. This section will deal with the cult of ancestral spirits of the Nwasi and true-Zambesi clans who formed the political and social aristocracy. Thus, in the form described here, the cult is

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exclusively related to the aristocratic tradition, and no account will be given or analysis made of ancestor cults practised by those groups in the two Ngoni kingdoms who were not of the leading clans. In the ancestor cult, as it will be described here, the emphasis was always on known and named spirits of the dead, associated with the village where the ritual was performed. In the approach to these known and named spirits—an approach which I have called a cult—there were three essential components: the diviner, the ritual address and the cattle. The diviner's role we shall discuss in Chapter III and the ritual forms of addressing the ancestors in Chapter IV. The Ngoni believed they could not approach their ancestral spirits except through their cattle, which had first to show that the spirits agreed to prayers being made, and the sign was that the beast urinated. The sacrifice of a beast was an integral part of the rite, which was concluded by the supplicants eating the meat together. At no point in their common life did the Ngoni more clearly demonstrate their dependence on their cattle than in the ritual of addressing their ancestral spirits. For this reason, in Chapter II we shall review the place of cattle in Ngoni life and relate it to their role in the ancestor cult.

Ancestral spirits of the Ngoni Paramounts.

The reigning Paramount and his predecessors in that office held an unchallenged supremacy in the hierarchy of the Ngoni kingdoms. The Ngoni believed that the line of dead Paramounts similarly led the hierarchy of the ancestral spirits, and that the dead Paramounts had power to help the Ngoni nation in time of need. It was taken for granted that when Paramounts died they would continue to be powerful and held in great respect, and that their position in the spirit world would enable them to influence UMkulumqango, the Great Spirit. This Great Spirit was believed to be the creator of all things and the ultimate source of power, particularly of sending rain, success in war, and deliverance from pestilence; and he was in general regarded as the giver of health and strength to mankind. The Ngoni held that those ancestors who were nearest to the living in time, whose names they knew, possessed less power than the remote ancestors whose names had been forgotten. On the same principle UMkulumqango, the Great Spirit, the originator of all creation, possessed more power than any other being, but, since he was so far removed in time from the living, no one could know his praise-names or his genealogy, and therefore he could not be addressed directly. In the same way the remotest ancestors of the Paramount could not be addressed directly because their praise-names were unknown to living men. Only those direct ancestors of the Paramount, whose names and genealogy and praise-names were known, could be addressed correctly and they could be counted on to use their influence with remoter and more powerful ancestral spirits and with the Great Spirit himself.

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in 1958.[1] The sociological and ritual significance of these factors will be the chief emphasis here, with reference to earlier chapters in this book on Ngoni culture and on the structure of Ngoni society.

In the sociological significance of cattle-ownership there are certain outstanding points to be emphasized, which will be indicated here and developed further in the analysis which follows. One is the connexion between cattle-ownership and status, illustrated by the dominance of the Swazi and trans-Zambesi clans in village life, since their possession of cattle was related to the kraal and to the siting of huts and to their house organization. The cattle horns on the *roof* of the *indlunkulu* were no trivial ornament. They were a proud assertion of cattle-ownership attached to the residences of the leading women, with all the implications of 'house herds' of cattle and of *lobola* given and received. Closely related to cattle-ownership and status was the power conferred by the possession of herds. The status of leading families was enhanced by the ability to give feasts, to give *lobola* for their sons' wives, to make sacrifices to the ancestors and, as we saw at the end of the last chapter, to realize cash by the sale of beasts belonging to the herd. Cattle-owners did at times have to decide whether to maintain and augment their herds and thereby be known as wealthy cattle-owning families, or to sell cattle in order to command labour to build a modern brick house, or to buy fine clothes for their wives and display their wealth in another form.

In the organization of Ngoni society, cattle were an important factor in uniting groups of persons. We have seen how the house, as a group of men and women, and its variant, the central Ngoni form of *hanja*, had common possession of a herd of cattle which formed a source of wealth for all members of the house. Within the house the senior men were bound together by the responsibilities attached to the ownership and care of a herd. Within the village the senior men of a house or *hanja* united in the upkeep of the kraal, the supervision of the herd-boys, the tending of sick cattle, and in meeting or resisting the Government's demands for culling or dipping stock. Where cattle were boarded out in another village, ties of association in the care of the beasts and in accountability for them bound together the cattle-owners or cattle-keepers of more than one village. A stage in the adjustment of a young wife to a strange village was reached when she added to the herd of the house she had married into the gift cattle given her by her father and so partly compensated for those which had been given to him by her husband's family. A new wife's standing in a village was thus advanced through any cattle which flowed in the opposite direction from those of the *lobola* cattle. Finally, and this is the main theme of this chapter, cattle were an essential link between the living and the dead.

[1] Read, M. *Native Standards of Living and African Culture Change*. Memorandum XVI of International African Institute, 1938.

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The relation of cattle-ownership to social integration, which was so marked a feature of Ngoni society, was limited to the Swazi and trans-Zambezi clans. There was evidence that the acquisition of herds by former captives and by the local Cewa and other tribes created conflicts within the society. The following statement was made by an Ntumbo village headman, commenting on several court cases relating to cattle-ownership. The reference in the last sentence is to the Ngoni practice in the *ownership of* cattle.

'Sometimes people say "If your father was caught and was the slave of a certain person, and also if your mother was caught and was a slave of another man, then if you buy cattle and put them in the kraal of your father, those who caught your father say "Those cattle are mine (or ours)." And those who caught your mother say "Those cattle are ours." ' They all say so because it was they who caught your ancestors. So those cattle do not recognize their real owner. And sometimes those cattle do not bear well, and sometimes they just die.

Then perhaps you die and leave your cattle, and those people are quarrelling to find out who is the owner of those cattle, since there are three people who want those same cattle: your father, the one who caught your father, and the one who caught your mother.

And it is really best if there are many manners that you, a child, should not buy cattle, but just leave off because they are a source of trouble. But one who is a free man without any manners, he ought to buy cattle because there will be no trouble for him.

Among the local Cewa tribes, when a man wanted to start a herd and had money to buy cattle, he was expected to give the money to his *malume* (mother's brother) who then bought the cattle and took charge of them and regarded them as his.[1] This assertion of ownership of cattle bought with another man's money was part of the services to which the mother's brother was entitled from his sister's children, in return for services which he had performed or would perform for them. If these relationships between a man and his *malume* were not working smoothly and the *malume* was not helping his nephew, there was a tendency for the man to turn to his own father and give him the money, and vest the ownership of the cattle in him, often because the father had paid the school fees or a court fine for his son. When the *malume* realized that his position had been usurped and that his chance of owning cattle had gone, his dislike of the man's father and his family showed itself in jealousy and quarrels between the two individuals and friction between the families. The Cewa matrilineal *mbumba* as a cattle-owning group under a senior man had not the continuity of the Ngoni house, for an *mbumba* was said to be 'finished' when a woman and all

[1] The Cewa believed that if cattle were to survive and increase, they had to be owned and cared for by senior men. On the highlands round Dedza the Cewa had had cattle before the Ngoni came.

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death, or he can give them to anyone he likes during his lifetime. Hence individual acquisition in the English sense involves the legal right of individual disposal; the individual possession of profits from such disposal; and the individual responsibility for complying with any regulations concerning cattle, such as inoculation, slaughter for foot-and-mouth disease, and tasting of milk.

In Ngoni usage the concept of ownership involved the acquisition and disposal of, and the responsibility for, cattle, but behind this apparent similarity of terms lay a wide difference in interpretation. Cattle could be acquired by inheritance, by natural increase, by *lobolo*, as payment in a court case, as a gift, or by purchase. Formerly cattle could be acquired in warfare and raiding, but never by purchase. With this exception of buying cattle for cash, the methods of acquiring cattle had not altered since the Ngoni settled in Nyasaland. In pre-European days in the Ngoni kingdoms only the Paramount, the subordinate chiefs, the *ahamumu* and the big *indunas* possessed cattle. Having a herd marked the owner as a leading member of a leading clan, or as a famous warrior of a lesser clan whose distinguished war service had been rewarded by the Paramount giving him cattle, or allowing him to keep some of those he had taken from the enemy. New herds were formed when a Paramount or a chief moved out of his father's village and set up his own *hamugulu* village, taking with him one or more of his mothers who, together with his big wife, set up houses in the new village, and those houses were allotted cattle from the former undivided herd. Another way in which a herd was divided was when a big *induna* in charge of the house of a leading wife of a Paramount or a chief built a kraal for the cattle of that house near his own huts, and added to that herd any cattle which he acquired. Large Ngoni villages in pre-European days usually had one or more kraals on the edge of the village, as well as the big central one. When the large villages broke up and the *induna* moved off to found his own village, he still took care of the cattle of that house. If the house was one where an ancestral spirit was guarded, a successor was always appointed to live in the hut and guard the spirit. Hence the relationship of the house, its spirit guardian, its cattle and the *induna* in charge continued, though the personalities changed through death and for other reasons. This explained how in the 1930's cattle were found in one kraal which were said to belong to a house or a woman guardian of a spirit miles away in another village. Sometimes they were described as the cattle of a man long dead.

It is clear, therefore, that the Ngoni methods of acquiring cattle and building up herds did not result in a concept of individual ownership. Cattle were not willed from father to son, but the son of a Paramount or a chief, when he made his new *hamugulu* village, had the right to receive and to take with him the cattle of his mother's house; and the head of the *gupo* village who stayed behind also received and looked after the

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The pressure on the Ngoni to possess ready cash was directly related to their prestige in the villages and kingdoms, and to the status of the Swazi and trans-Zambezi class. Money was needed for good buildings and good clothing, two of the readiest signs of status which the Ngoni could not ignore. Faced with this situation, and unwilling, except among the urban Ngoni, to invest savings in banks,[1] they manipulated their cattle tradition to suit the new situation in several ways. In place of the frequent slaughter for food, there was occasional sale for cash. Money earned in wages was invested in cattle. The drive therefore was all the time to increase the herds, in order to be able to convert them into cash when the need arose.

Values and attitudes in cattle-ownership

Any attempt to probe below the surface of current practices in acquiring, owning and using cattle should be preceded by an extensive survey of cattle-keeping, including the full implications of their place in the economy of Ngoni village and family life. Since a complete survey is not possible here, the assessment of the values inherent in the ownership of cattle and the resultant attitudes towards their acquisition and use is related in this chapter to the relationships between the living Ngoni and their ancestors. These values were primarily those of the senior men and women of Swazi and trans-Zambezi class, and hence those of the aristocracy. They were reflected in the attitudes of groups who owned cattle in the villages. Further analysis would show variations in the attitudes of individual members of these groups who possessed cattle, and would also show an approximation to the Ngoni attitudes by members of other groups, for example, village headmen of Ntumbu clans whose fathers had journeyed and fought with the Ngoni in the past. The spread of cattle-keeping beyond the former exclusive monopoly of the leading clans and of leading men in them resulted in a number of different attitudes towards the acquisition and use of cattle. Some of these variations were suggested earlier in this chapter in the brief comparisons of Cewa and Ngoni ownership of cattle.

The primary value of cattle to the Ngoni was the security they represented. This security lay in assurance of social position, in being able to meet penalties imposed by the courts, in the potential command of labour, in the enjoyment of much prized food, in the performance of ritual for the dead and in sacrifices to the ancestors. The converse of this security was the fear of losing cattle, and this was primarily a group attitude rather than an individual one. A man living in a town who had sent money to his father to buy cattle, and who heard that they had died, very often shrugged his shoulders when he heard of the loss and

[1] The Ngoni in Blantyre put about half of their savings into banks and sent the rest to their home villages to buy cattle.

about a sick relative. He asked for a preliminary payment in cash from one before he would say anything in front of me, having already received the customary present of fowls from the sick man's relatives. There was an atmosphere of pit pantomime, part reluctant performance in front of a stranger whose presence seemed to trouble him more than it did his clients. He wore a python-skin cap with beads dangling from it, and carried the tail of a black cow bound with lead and a small skin bag with the bone in it. At first he sat holding the tail in his hands and sniffing it occasionally. Then he suddenly shook the bone out of the bag—six large beans called *bukwanini* about twenty small round nuts called *mapi*. He put snuff on the tip of each bean, sprinkled snuff on the nuts, picked the nuts up in both hands, shook his hands together and threw the nuts on the ground. Some fell near the big beans, others rolled between them. He looked intently at them, then at the group waiting to consult him. 'There is someone who is sick,' he said to them and the group replied '*Siyavuma*' (we agree). They continued to chant *siyavuma* in a low tone over and over again with an almost mesmeric effect. He meantime went on to describe the sickness, that it was a pain inside the man (the chanting was loud), that had been on the right side (less response), in the stomach (less response), on the left side (loud response). At intervals he waved the tail in the air and knocked the leaded end on the ground to emphasize the loud response. He did not specify the complaint but advised the people attending him to go home and kill a goat as a sacrifice to their ancestors, and give the sick man some medicines which he would sell them.

It may have been the mixture of a real consultation with my visit which produced this slightly mountebank performance, and it may also have been his combination of the role of diviner with peddling medicines which the party present for the consultation evidently expected to obtain from him. This aspect of his performance impressed itself on the Ngoni informant who was with me. He was slightly contemptuous throughout, even when the songs were being sung and taken down. He kept on muttering 'This is Nsenga,' and said afterwards as we were going away that this diviner worked only for ordinary people and their sicknesses, as witnessed by his telling them to sacrifice a goat, and that he would not have been acknowledged by the real Ngoni. He was making comparisons all the time between the 'people of the head' and the diviners of this type illustrating the Ngoni esteem for the real dreamers, and the slight, sometimes great, contempt for those who combined divining with recommending medicines as remedies.

The contrast between the performance of this diviner and that of the two *inanusi* whom I saw at work in the central kingdom was considerable. My long residence in Mzakhatha and the entrée I had to all that was taking place in connexion with the sickness of Bambo Mangs no doubt helped to give confidence to the diviners. The chief and his

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in the village, whom they regarded as inferior not only because they had been conquered, but because they disliked and despised their way of living. This sense of separateness from and of superiority to the non-Ngoni elements in the village had its counterpart in the close ties which existed with Ngoni families in other villages. These ties were reinforced socially by 'dynastic' or inter-clan marriages, and politically through the hierarchy of courts and officials leading up to the Paramount's court and entourage.

The Ngoni aristocracy endeavoured to maintain their traditional ways of living and of bringing up their children in the face of changes creeping in from the non-Ngoni elements in the village, as well as from external European influences. The maintenance of Ngoni ways of living and cultural patterns of behaviour depended on three main elements in village society. One was the degree of integration between the Ngoni men in their house groups and in village society as a whole. This was most evident in chiefs' villages, and in the villages belonging to the heads of clans. The second element was the number of wives of true Ngoni families who had married into the village, thus combining the influence of husband and wife, or rather of father and mother, in bringing up children on the Ngoni pattern. The third element was the number and influence of senior women of Ngoni families, either wives of older men in the village, or widows of former leaders. This senior women's group, many of whom were addressed as 'mother' by the Ngoni fathers of young families, were a formidable force in maintaining tradition, by advising their sons, coercing their daughters-in-law, and holding on to their authority at every stage of the children's development.

Life in two Ngoni villages

I am going briefly to sketch in, as a general background for the following chapters, the main features of two villages, in one of which I lived for several months, the other for a few weeks.

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anxious to protect her charge in every way, and with the connivance of the women helpers she made little charms of bits of roots to hang around the baby's neck to make him grow quickly and to ward off sorcery and witchcraft. She threaded pumpkin seeds and tied them around his neck to make his teeth come quickly if they were late in appearing. These charms were generally those used by the local peoples, and Ngoni fathers were contemptuous about their use and efficacy. 'These women are spoiling our children,' they said, and then reassured themselves by remembering that a boy would be free from such women's spoiling once he went into the boys' dormitory.

Variants on the Ngoni pattern

This traditional pattern of authority and behaviour in respect of birth, infant care and weaning was essentially that of the true Ngoni, that relatively small aristocratic group who never forgot their superior social status and its foundation in their ancestry. This first stage in the socialisation of a child, from birth to weaning, brought out clearly two fundamental features of Ngoni social organization. One was the role played by the senior women who had themselves in their childhood been brought up on strict Ngoni lines. The father of the new baby accepted the role played by his own mother in controlling, and if necessary coercing, his young wife. Though, as we shall see later, every Ngoni boy and young man had a period of virtually complete escape from feminine control, once a man married and his young wife was established within the social group of his mother's house, he acknowledged his mother's authority over her, and particularly over the birth and care of his child. The mother-son relationship of the young father to his own mother dominated the relationship of the young mother to her child. Young Ngoni fathers never questioned their allegiance to their own mothers, cherishing them as they grew older and supporting them in their exercise of authority. Much as he loved his

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choice and variety of food, was primarily to please him, and 593
to meet the incessant claims on his hospitality when visitors 592
came. A well-ordered and harmonious household also pleased
him, and conversely the sounds of women quarrelling an- [183]
gered him and violated his canons of accepted Ngoni be-
haviour. It was his wife's task to supervise the household 957
helpers, who were mostly non-Ngoni, and to make them 592
conform to Ngoni patterns by controlling their rages, instead
of yelling at each other and hurling accusations of witchcraft
at those with whom they were angry.

Ngoni women also took a serious view of another aspect of 542
pleasing their husbands, namely attention to their person and 593
dress. The old elaborate hair-dressing of Ngoni women, the 302
scrupulous washing of their bodies with sweet-smelling leaves, 515
the use of oil and clarified butter on the skin and hair, and 501
the careful tying and draping of cloths and arranging of
bead headbands and necklaces—these all were forms of
beauty treatment and personal hygiene designed to please
the husband. They also reinforced the self-respect and author- [565]
ity of well-born Ngoni women, marking them out by their
well-groomed appearance from the 'workers' and 'helpers'
who surrounded them.

The young Ngoni child, up to the age of six or seven, grew 602
up in a women's world of the kind just described. His mother 955
was learning from his paternal grandmother the increasing [606]
duties and responsibilities of an Ngoni wife, although she
was supposed to have learned some of them in her own home
from her mother before marriage. We saw in Chapter II how
the social horizons of a small Ngoni child were never of a
narrow type, restricted to his individual family. The care of
a child, especially between the time of weaning and the
coming of second teeth, was the concern of a number of
women in addition to his own mother, from whom he was
snatched away at weaning, and, for a time at least, kept
away from her household for eating and sleeping.

Among the female population of a village most nearly [561]

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872 go herding. School was sometimes regarded as an easy option where you sat still all day and repeated things after the
[874] teacher. This was far from being the case in a village like Enkeldlweni where the headmaster was well trained and kept the boys on their toes. In such schools the boys themselves were enthusiastic about learning, and regarded going to school as a dignified and worth-while occupation, and not a childish amusement.

Girls' life in the village

858 When the girls had their second teeth and were acknowledged to have reached the new stage in their development, there was no abrupt transition for them, as for their brothers, from the household circle to the dormitory, or from the women's world to the men's world. They continued as part of the women's world; they changed their occupations and their daily routine on the whole very little; and they went on sleeping in the hut of a widowed aunt or grandmother. All that was said however in the earlier part of the chapter about accountability for their behaviour was as true as for the boys.

561 The Ngoni girls of leading families formed a distinct group,
[565] called in the age-set terms 'children' until they were about eleven and then 'immature girls' until they reached puberty. There was in Ngoni thought and practice a clear division between immature and mature girls, and we shall see what this involved in girls' life in Chapters VI and VII. The age-set terms used to distinguish between children and immature girls did not imply any real differences in ways of living, manners and occupations. The girls between about seven and fourteen were looked on as belonging to a 'girls' circle', and this girls' circle had certain distinctive features.

561 In the first place the tendency of the girls to draw apart
562 from the boys of their own age, already evident before the
535 coming of the second teeth, was now more or less complete
628 with the boys' withdrawal into dormitory life and their preoccupation with herding. Later, about the age of twelve

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858 upbringing, they would be unwilling to consider an alliance if
581 the girl's mother were known to be a doubtful character or a careless housewife. The girl's prospects in marriage depended not only on her own reputation and character, but on the household milieu in which she was known to have grown up.

561 The Ngoni girls in this circle were not only an exclusive
858 group. They were a carefully guarded and protected one.
[601] The surveillance of the grandmother, as the woman head of the girl's father's house, was dominant. Besides watching to see if the girl's home was proving a satisfactory training
597 ground, she chose a 'companion' or 'attendant' for the girl,
855 to take the place of the nurse girl. She was a little older than the Ngoni girl, but near enough in age to enjoy and enter into all her occupations and amusements. This companion, chosen from among the helpers in the grandmother's household, grew up with the Ngoni girl, waited on her to some extent, went everywhere with her, slept in the same hut and ate in the same household.

561 In her daily life in the village an Ngoni girl had in her
872 circle all those whom she called 'sisters' and their companions. There was one exception to the exclusiveness of this
[601] group, and that was the school. Many Ngoni fathers who decided that school was a good thing for their boys, decided that it would also be wise to send their girls to school, especially if they showed signs of exceptional ability and leadership. This was sometimes carried through in the teeth of opposition from the grandmother, but the father usually won the day. For Ngoni girls school was an escape from the relative dullness and monotony of compound life, as also from the continual surveillance which became stricter as they grew older and entered the immature girls' group. The Ngoni girls enjoyed mixing with boys, being taught by men, learning to read and write, hearing Bible stories. The daughters of Ngoni chiefs and heads of leading clans were easily
● [565] distinguishable in the schools by their controlled and dignified behaviour in class and in the playground. They were not

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given to giggling and putting their head on one side when asked questions. They took their school work seriously in order to show that they, the Ngoni girls, were the intelligent ones. They were also aware that the number of cattle to be transferred at their marriage would be greater according to whether they finished school in Standard II, III, IV, or even VI.

Apart from going to school, which was only for the daughters of relatively forward-looking Ngoni fathers, the girls continued to take part in the daily routine of the household. They and their companions, according to their growth and strength and pleasure, did a little pounding, fetching water, grinding grain, roasting ground-nuts. In a large household, where there were many helpers, the daughters of the family only did as much as they felt inclined of the domestic chores. As they said: 'It was like our play.' They spent more time with the young children, or washing themselves and their clothes by the stream. Combing and dressing their hair, rubbing fat or oil on their skin, threading beads, plaiting grass or fibres, learning how to make Ngoni bead designs for head bands or wristlets—all these formed the lighter and more amusing side of the daily routine.

From among the girls in this exclusive and protected girls' circle, Ngoni girls chose a particular friend, whom they always addressed as 'my friend', even if she were a classificatory sister or cousin. As with the boys in the dormitory this friend was a confidante to whom a girl could talk freely about her life in the compound, her likes and dislikes among the other girls and women, her ideas about suitors and marriage. The friend was always from another compound and of a leading Ngoni clan. The two friends made bracelets and necklets for each other, and went to bathe in the stream together. Sometimes the friendship lasted until the girls were married and separated. At times it broke up suddenly in a violent quarrel. There was however a curious tenacity about these friendship pacts, and they were more often maintained

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returning from work in the south about every two years or so, even if it was only for temporary residence in the village, mitigated, though only to some extent, the social disintegration and upheaval caused by the absence of so many young men.

In pre-European days, girls waited to marry for five to ten years after attaining puberty. For high-born Ngoni girls a further 'pre-marriage' ceremony and ritual took place immediately before marriage. This was after the girl and young man accepted by her as a 'lover' had been courting for some time but before any formal betrothal took place which involved the approach of the two families through intermediaries, and the discussions about the transfer of cattle. The Ngoni said that this pre-marriage rite was the equivalent for the girls of taking the head-ring for the men, because when it was held it was a public declaration that marriage was now possible for the girl, and she was acknowledged as having reached adult, that is married women's, status.

This ceremony began by the senior women of the girl's home sending for her father and saying to him: 'This child is now grown up. She is ready to be prepared to enter the state of adulthood.' One of the Ngoni names for the ceremony meant—'staying in the hut as if fasting'—a ritual practice associated with rain-making by the Paramount, and with taking 'medicines' for strengthening a new Paramount or chief on his accession. The girl, with her companion, spent two or three days in a hut, hidden behind upright mats curved so that no one could see round them. They were naked except for a long soft leather cloak worn over one shoulder and tied under the right arm. During this seclusion they had food brought to them by the senior women of the girl's house. While the girls were hidden away the village women cooked quantities of meat and brewed beer to entertain friends and relatives of the girl's father. During the feasting and drinking the senior women, with the men, danced the special dances and sang the songs associated with this ritual. Some of

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2. *Growing up in New Guinea.* Kegan Paul, 1939—Penguin, 1954. These were two pioneer studies in the Pacific.
3. *New Worlds for Old.* Gollancz, 1956. The New Guinea area was revisited after 25 years. See especially chapters V, XIII and XIV for Dr. Mead's assessment of her former study.

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2. *Education and Social Change in Tropical Areas.* Nelson, 1955. See especially the papers on Anthropology and Education (page 68), and Cultural Contacts in Education (page 96).
3. *Education and Cultural Tradition.* Evans, 1950. Inaugural lecture on the study of child training in non-literate societies.

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II

DEFINITIONS

CULTURE, the total way of living of a people, including kinship relations, economy, religion and magic, law, government, language, myths, child training etc.

ETHNIC GROUP, used here instead of tribe because the Ngoni kingdoms and villages included several tribes. (See Ngoni of Nyasaland p. 1-6).

CLAN, exogamous group related through male line with a common clan name used in address. True Ngoni clans formed the aristocracy (See Ngoni of Nyasaland p. 116).

4: Barnes E-5 (1946-1949)1951 FR5 Ngoni FR5
Mpezeni

contributed by the whole nation, were not found among the Ngoni.

Informants are agreed that in the old days young men and women married whom they were told and never attempted to make their own choice against their parents' will. From evidence available this seems to be an oversimplification. It seems likely that individual choice mattered less in those days than it does now, but it cannot have been entirely inoperative. It is said that each regiment of men used to flirt with its corresponding women's regiment, and that marriages sometimes followed. Wiese says that among the aristocratic families a woman had the right to choose her own husband, but that this right was dying out and it was becoming the practice to marry off daughters so as to secure the most marriage cattle and maintain upper-class endogamy.[3] It is true that on the evidence of genealogies there do not seem to have been many marriages between very aristocratic women and the most recently captured men, and that therefore we are justified in assuming a tendency towards upper-class endogamy, but this tendency seems not to have been very strong and indeed there never was a clear-cut upper class but instead a method of ranking families in terms of ethnic origin. My informants never suggested that a man would marry his daughter so as to bring in as many cattle as possible, and it seems unlikely that this was ever a common motive.[4]

A girl was expected to be chaste before she was married. From the procedure adopted by the Zulu and from information from other Ngoni groups, it seems likely that girls were examined at marriage to check that they had not been deflowered. Rattray records this among the Ngoni of Southern Nyasaland,[5] and Read makes a similar statement.[6] My own informants had such faith in the sexual rectitude of the past as contrasted with the promiscuity of the present that it was difficult to establish what they really thought happened. It seems that unmarried people were allowed intercourse *inter crura* and that this was considered not a violation of chastity. The whole question has been obscured by the conflict of values between the South-Eastern Bantu leaders, whose view appeared to have prevailed at the time, and the recent captives from the Cewa and kindred peoples, who believed that a girl would die if she did not copulate at puberty. We shall see the outcome of this conflict when we come to discuss modern marriage.

As might be anticipated in a system in which marriage is a transfer of fertility, a wife was expected to be fertile. If she was barren special procedures were adopted to validate the substance of the marriage. A man could appeal to his wife's relatives for another

[3] Wiese, op. cit. 'Expedição . . .', p. 473 and 'Geschichte . . .', p. 191.
[4] See below, p. 120.
[5] Rattray, *Some folk-lore stories and songs in Chinyanja, with English translation and notes*, S.P.C.K., 1907, p. 115.
[6] Margaret Read, 'The Moral code of the Ngoni and their former military state', *Africa*, xi (1938), p. 6.

9: Read E-5 (1935) 1936 FR5 Ngoni FR5

history in order to prove their unity with the true Ngoni. It is nevertheless recognized that the aristocrats, through their kinship links with the past, have the best knowledge; the rest listen and defer to them. For matters relating to history are no antiquarian interest to the Ngoni. It is probable that recalling history and dwelling on the great days of the past is to some extent a compensation for what the Ngoni consider the indignities of their position to-day. Yet it is also a stimulus to them to maintain their separate identity and to revere their institutions. Tradition supports rank, by recognizing the historical importance of certain clans; and rank preserves tradition because intimate knowledge is the proud monopoly of certain families.

V. TRADITION AND LEGEND AS DOCUMENTATION. To the anthropologist who examines the part played by tradition and legend in the culture of a people, Professor Malinowski has given an invaluable lead. He suggests that myths are the charter and documentation for traditional tribal life, 'statements of reality which live in the institutions and pursuits of the people';[1] and that legend is re-interpreted history. All peoples of whatever level of civilization interpret history in the light of their beliefs about themselves, their achievements, and their destiny. The Ngoni are no exception to this. Sometimes they relate factual history which is verifiable and accurate. At other times it is probably part fact, part fiction. Yet at all times the emphasis in, and interpretation of, tradition, has a definite purpose, and it is possible to see how a standardized form of a narrative has come to be accepted and believed in. The version of a narrative at one time was interpreted or moulded to serve a purpose. Having been established, it then moulds the thinking of the people on that particular issue. The vexed question of the supremacy of the two Paramounts, Mpezeni and Mwambera[2] is a case in point. The basis of the story of the original dispute is the same, but the versions as told in each 'country' differ in a succession of minute details, whose arrangement and emphasis prove the point in each case. Mpezeni's historians have arranged the details to prove that he is the rightful *inkosi*; Mwambera's historians

[1] B. Malinowski. Article on Culture in *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*.

[2] The two Paramounts at present holding these titles are grandsons of the first holders, to whom I refer as old Mpezeni.

13:Fraser M-5 (ca. 1890) 1901
FR5 Ngoni FR5

condition. It helped to maintain the comparatively high morality of the people. And it was never allowed to go to the extremes that the Tonga or others went to when a single chief would have 100 wives. The expensiveness of marriage put a limit on a man's matrimonial ambitions. Yet polygamy was essentially an evil custom. It was based on sensuality and on indolence. And when Christianity comes bringing industry, and self-restraint, it must disappear.

In the old days the chiefs would not allow the men to marry till they were over thirty, and the women were strong and full grown. This preserved the splendid physique of the tribe. But now the laxer customs of the Central Africans is telling on the Ngoni, and one of our hardest tasks is to absolutely refuse marriage to couples whom we think to be too young for this serious responsibility. I have a marriage service every Tuesday, at which I usually unite eight or ten couples in holy wedlock. But these have first of all to come to me that I must judge by appearance, for they cannot tell their ages, whether they have reached the stature of manhood and womanhood. Then if I am satisfied the banns are published and they are married.

But before a man has reached this stage, he must first pay his father-in-law a dowery for his daughter. The value of the dowery varies, according to the rank of the family into which he would marry. The daughter of a chief might be worth to her father as much as twenty cattle, while a slave might only receive two or three goats This also was a great restraint on early marriages, for a man could not marry until he had time to gain a little wealth, and pay for his wife.

The position of a wife of an aristocrat was one of considerable ease and dignity. She had to work certainly, but she had also a considerable following of slaves to assist her in her labours. But the position of the wives of the commoners was little better than that of slaves. When the rains came on the husband sallied out with his wives. He sat on an ant hill and snuffed, and from this exalted position directed the labours of his wives who hoed.

In this the Ngoni were less noble than their neighbours, for many of the surrounding people think it is a disgrace to send the woman to the gardens. When the harvesting came, the women went to the gardens and reaped and carried home the grain, while the husband prepared the barns. And women pounded the grain and cooked it. While the men had the pleasure of eating it.

13:Fraser M-5 (ca. 1890) 1901
FR5 Ngoni FR5

borne out in Roman days also, that the handier, and more artful and skilful people have usually a lower social morality than the fighting races. Our Ngoni came to Nyasaland as a moral blessing. The ordinary obscenity of the indigenous people was not for a moment tolerated among the Ngoni. It is very appalling to hear and see how degraded were the Tumbuka into whose land they came. A people among whom virginity was unknown, where family relationship was no defence, where men and women lived in an atmosphere that was charged with vice. But when the Ngoni came, many of the foul practices of the Tumbuka were punished with death. Their obscene dances were prohibited, many of their superstitious customs were banned, and generally a higher type of morality was superimposed.

The aristocratic Ngoni is a gentleman through and through. His word is absolute. When he gives a promise you may fearlessly rely on it. He does not steal, nor does he intrude on your privacy. I have heard the old men storm in a village because some boys stood around staring at me, or speaking. Before a superior they should sit down, and remain silent, or only speak in whispers. When they address you they always give you your family name of honour, or if they don't know it, round off each sentence with a "sire." When you come into a village you sit at the gate of the cattle kraal and wait for your reception. After a long time the elders of the village appear. Their courtesy is that the longer the wait the greater the welcome. For if they come out quickly they seem to say you had better clear out quickly. When they appear they sit down at some distance, and remain silent. You must not speak till you are spoken to. After a decent interval, they come forward, sit down, and leisurely say, "We see you, sire." Then you reply, "Yes, sire." That is the whole courtesy. Conversation may now begin. When you would rise to go, you first of all say, "Remain in peace, sire," and they reply, "Yes, and go thou in peace, sire." It is very courteous and friendly, and they accompany you along the path a little way, and again send you off with salutation.

Their village life is not without interests and amusements. During the day in the head villages there are continual trials in open court—trials which last for hours and days with continual speech-making. In the evenings the kraal echoes with the chorus of village dances. Quite the prettiest and most delightful dance is the village competitive dance which is held during the day. A